

A PROPHET
OF THE SPIRIT

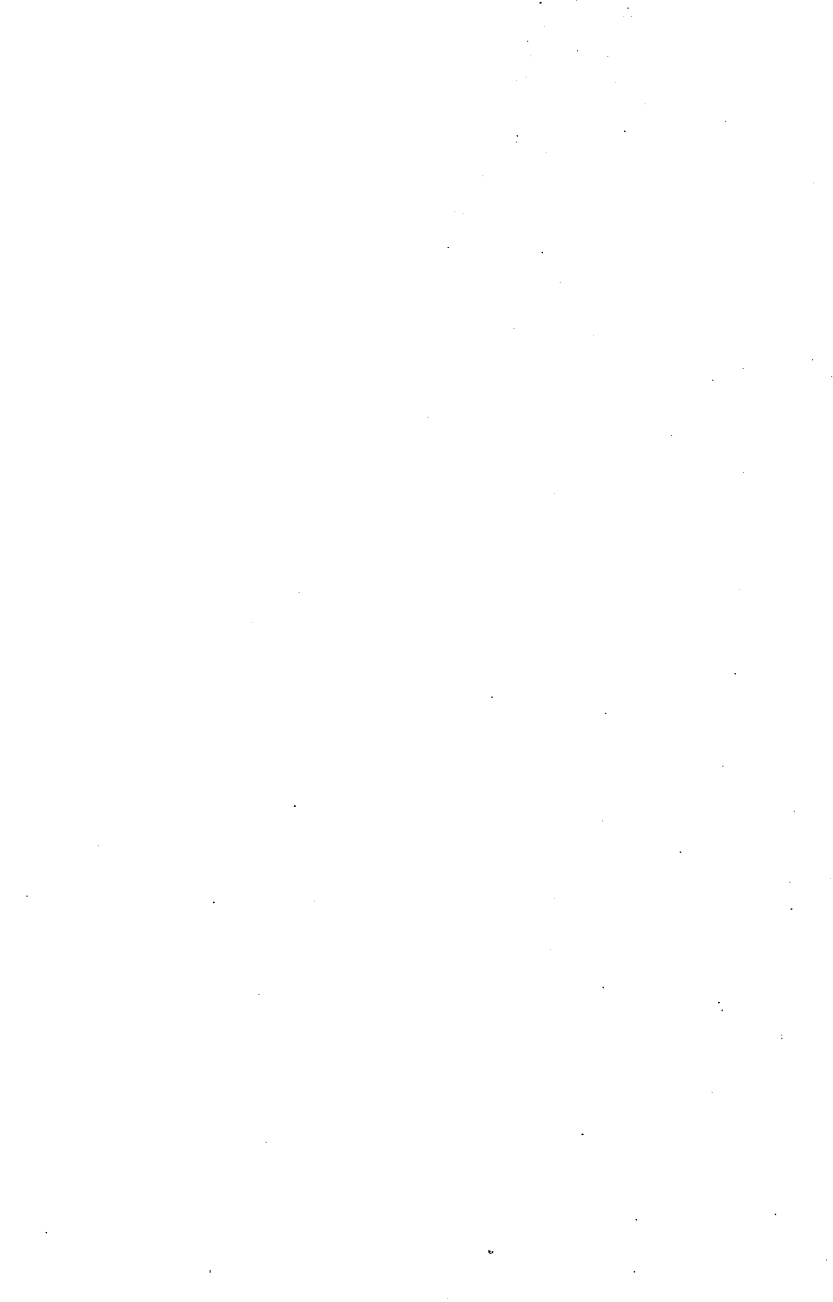
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**A PROPHET OF
THE SPIRIT**

**A Sketch of the Character and
Work of Jeremiah**

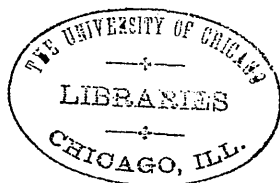
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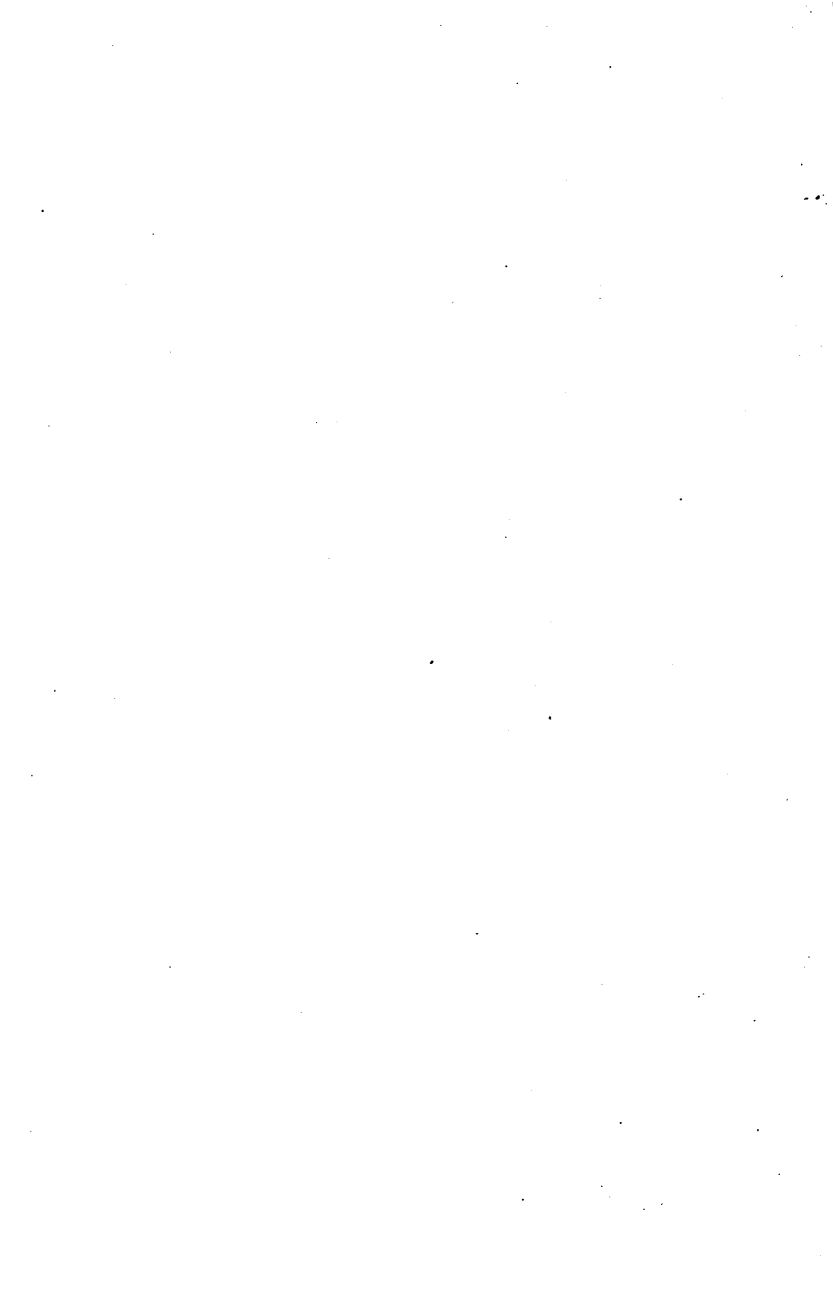


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TO MY WIFE



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PREFACE

WHEN a Sargent puts all the prophets into one picture, he reproduces the feeling of many a reader of the Bible that the prophets were closely associated. In the Bible the books stand together as in the picture the men stand together; and it is easily supposed that the lives were lived and the books produced in one brief period. Where the Scripture is concerned distinctions of time and circumstance are sometimes felt to be irrelevant, if not irreverent. Within the sacred precincts of the Bible time becomes eternity, men are merged in messages, and the places of earth are lost in the spaces of heaven.

The following brief study of the prophet Jeremiah has been made in the belief that attention to these distinctions leads to a discovery of God's methods of self-revelation, and that such discovery immeasurably deepens and strengthens the spiritual appeal of the Bible and the spiritual values of life.

PREFACE

The whole book of Jeremiah has not been brought under review; to much of it no reference whatever has been made. The purpose has been to portray a man rather than to expound a book. Special students will at once recognize that no originality can be claimed beyond that which inheres in a presentation guided by a definite aim. Sincere thanks are due to Professor Samuel A. Lough, of the University of Denver, not only for reading the manuscript but also for some most helpful suggestions.



Servant of God, well done! well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms.

—*Milton.*

And the vision of the dream was this: He saw Onias, him that was high priest, . . . with outstretched hands invoking blessings on the whole body of the Jews: thereupon he saw a man appear, of venerable age and exceeding glory, and wonderful and most majestic was the dignity around him: and Onias answered and said, This is the lover of the brethren, he who prayeth much for the people and the holy city, Jeremiah the prophet of God.—*2 Macc. 14*¹²⁻¹⁴.

CHAPTER I

BEFORE READING HIS BOOK

THREE PRELIMINARY DISTINCTIONS—THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK—"THUS SAITH THE LORD"—BARUCH AS A REPORTER—TWO LITERARY ELEMENTS IN THE BOOK.

To many readers it is almost a matter of indifference, when Jeremiah or any other prophet is mentioned, whether the reference is to the man, or to the book which bears his name. The Bible is so taken for granted that the distinction between man and book has been all but lost. To emphasize this distinction may incur a charge of novelty. And yet this is only the beginning of that process of discrimination by which any great personality is disengaged from tradition, until he stands clearly and sharply defined against the background of history.

Still further distinctions are to be recognized in the career of the prophet himself. He lived before he wrote. He was a prophet

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first, and an author afterward. The life preceded the literature, and the literature simply reflected and reported the preceding life and experience. It was only because the life and experience compelled the attention and the allegiance of some of the prophet's contemporaries that the conditions were met which led to the production of a written record. The very existence of the book is thus seen to be a testimony to the prophet's original greatness. In other words, while it is true in a certain sense that Jeremiah derives his greatness from his place in the Bible, it is equally true that the Bible is great because it contains the records of such men as Jeremiah.

Because of its vital bearing on the use and understanding of the Bible as a whole, it is worth while to take at least one more step. In addition to the distinctions between the man and his book, and between what he wrought and what he wrote, there must be recognized the time and process intervening between the completion of any single book and its later inclusion in the sacred collec-

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tion of books constituting the Bible. It is clear that the Bible could not be completed until its several books were written. It is equally clear that the books were not written at the same time. So that the formation of the Bible as it now exists involved a process of some complexity, and a period of time long enough to complete the process. Fascinating, and in many respects surprising as the story is, it is too long for narration here.¹ In the study of any other literature the importance of this subject is recognized as a matter of course. Only in the case of the Bible, the most precious literature of all, are such matters apt to be ignored.

In containing an elaborate account of the circumstances under which it was produced, the book of Jeremiah is unique among the books of the Bible. The literary conventions of the Western world did not obtain among the Hebrews of Palestine twenty-five hundred years ago; and books as such were treated with a freedom which to-day

¹ Smyth, *The Bible in the Making*, outlines the story briefly yet fully.

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could not be regarded with indifference. Not only was it permissible to correct or to expand a writing, if the owner of the copy so desired, but such alterations were often regarded as desirable improvements, much as to-day the annotations made by some eminent possessor greatly increase the value of an otherwise ordinary copy of some book. Circumstances of origin and authorship were quite subordinate matters, and such an elaborate narrative as the one in chapter 36 is both rare and precious. While it is hardly probable that it was written solely for the purpose of giving literary information, it is just this information that constitutes much of its present value.

The opening words of this chapter reflect at once the world of Hebrew religious thought—the Bible world—and justify another brief excursion into the general field of biblical interpretation. The immediate impulse to write is described as, “the word of the LORD.” This expression, along with the kindred, “thus saith the LORD,” may be regarded in a fashion that makes these

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phrases artificial and mechanical. In Hebrew as in English there are certain phrases in which the words, to a certain extent, have lost their individual values. These phrases are idiomatic expressions, and must be understood as wholes, rather than as literal statements whose meanings can be discovered from grammatic structure and from the definitions of the separate words. It is to this class of expressions that these phrases belong. They do not teach that God needs to use language in order to communicate with men, nor that any particular words in any language represent the divine *ipsissima verba*. A divine revelation to one who spoke some other language than Hebrew would necessarily be uttered in that other language; and the introductory phrase idiomatic in that other language would then be employed. These phrases do no more than assert the speaker's or writer's convictions that the statements thus introduced express God's thoughts and represent the divine will. In other words, these phrases introduce ideas rather than particular words;

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and the will of God, as contained in the passages which they introduce, is the divine will *as apprehended by the speaker or writer.*

In the Bible no such effacement of personality is involved as would reduce the speaker or writer to a mechanical mouthpiece or a recording automaton. For such a one as Paul, "the word" was the wonderful message about Jesus, told simply according to the ability of the speaker (1 Thess. 2₁₃, compare Acts 8₄). In harmony with this would be the similar expressions which regard Truth as the divine law or word, as in Psa. 119₁₄₂ and John 17₁₇. These familiar phrases, then, which refer to God as "saying" or "speaking," are simply the beautiful Hebrew way in which the Hebrew prophets, saints, apostles, prefaced their statement of the will of God as it had been revealed to them, without any thought of imposing limitations upon future revelations of different intent or wider scope. They were so sure and strong in their faith, so selfless in their earnestness, that in uttering the conviction of their hearts they leaped at once to its Source and said,

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“Thus saith the LORD.” The modern, abstract way is to say, “I believe the will of God to be—,” or, “It is God’s will that—”; but the difference is only one of language, not one of thought.

In this light the opening words of chapter 36 are seen to embody an experience both real and intelligible. When the conviction came to Jeremiah that there was a divine purpose to be served by setting down in writing the teachings hitherto delivered orally, he said, as any Hebrew would have said, “The word of the LORD¹ came saying, Write.” In response to this conviction, and this is only a further illustration of the free use of the idiomatic phrase, Jeremiah him-

¹ The word printed “LORD” (each letter a capital) in the King James Version, and the word “Jehovah” in the American Standard Revision both stand for the word used by the Hebrews of their national Deity, the God of Israel. They are to be distinguished from the words “God” and “Lord.” The Hebrew word “God” is the general term for Deity, whether of Israel or of another nation. The Hebrew word “Lord” has the same freedom of application as the English word, being used for one of superior rank whether master, noble, or Deity. A fine illustration of the need for discrimination in the use of these words may be found in 1 Kings 18:20-40.

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self writes nothing; it is Baruch who does the actual writing. In harmony with this, the dominant character of the book is that of Baruch's reminiscences of Jeremiah. While this is not to be taken in a Boswellian sense, it is highly probable that many of the sayings of Jeremiah that are here preserved were never intended "for publication," but were spoken directly to Baruch in the freedom of intimate intercourse, being set down by him as worthy of record—and they were. This would be especially true of the numerous passages which report Jeremiah's inner, personal, and spiritual experiences.

Comparing Jer. 1₂ with 36₁, it appears that Jeremiah had been engaged in prophetic work for twenty-two years before the book was written. That he had written down anything before this time is possible, but cannot be asserted positively. If he had preached with any diligence during this period he must have said much more than is contained in this book. The probability is that the discourses included here represent his characteristic and representative ideas.

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In any case, however, he was primarily a speaker rather than a writer; and this is true, with but few exceptions, of the prophets generally. And they were not only speakers rather than writers, but they spoke with a freedom that laid no stress on etymological niceties. For them language was but a means to an end, never an end in itself. They uttered their messages in any way that seemed to promise effectiveness. They were concerned with the awakening and amending of the lives of their contemporaries; and any means that would perfect this was welcomed and exercised. Jesus shows the same freedom in the use of language. His disregard of verbal identities is obvious in the differences between the versions of the Beatitudes and of the Lord's Prayer as given by Matthew and by Luke. For his purpose words alone were inadequate; life alone had terms in which it could be expressed.

The prophetic forerunners of Jesus were primarily concerned to impress upon their hearers those high conceptions of God's character, and of man's resultant duty, that

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have ever been characteristic of the prophetic line. Indeed, if one were to attempt to epitomize the supreme work of the prophets, it might be stated as the development of the idea of God, for it was almost exclusively through their teachings that these conceptions were gradually advanced and ennobled, were slowly spiritualized and universalized, so that men outgrew their early, crude notions of the Divine Being, and moved on to the place where they could receive the exalted revelation which came through Jesus. In this way more than in any other did the prophets prepare the way for him, and for the Christian thought of God as Father.

The presence of enduring elements in the prophetic teachings does not mean that these teachings were given in abstract form. There are no parts of the Bible so immediately practical for the times when they were given, nor so dependent upon their times and circumstances for their interpretation, as the books of the prophets. The book of Jeremiah is no exception. Not only were Jere-

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miah's discourses designed for definite situations, but in their application to these Jeremiah differed widely from his predecessor Isaiah, as well as from his follower Ezekiel. It is now seen that one of the characteristics of the prophets is this very immediacy of their work. They labored to awaken, to inspire, and to direct their own generation by applying to the present concrete situation their new and advanced conceptions of righteousness and of the will of God; and it is idle to suppose that their significance can be appreciated or their message understood unless they are seen against the background, and in the light of, the conditions in which they appeared and to which they were designed to apply. While at first it may seem that to connect a prophet so closely with his own age may limit his scope and lower his position, this result is only apparent, not real. Experience shows that when approached from this direction, the prophets are not only more deeply impressive but spiritually more significant than when these circumstances are ignored.

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So far the book has been referred to as though it were all written, just as it now stands, on the occasion described in chapter 36; but such a conclusion would be premature. The chapter distinctly says, in the first place, that Jeremiah's purpose was to write out what he had been teaching during those preceding years, not to tell the story of his life; whereas the book as it now stands contains much purely narrative material, such as this very chapter, wherein no discourses of Jeremiah appear, but only an account of how the book (roll) came to be written. The idea that the whole book was written continuously, as a unit, is further contradicted by the statement at the close of the chapter that to the second roll (the one that survived) "were added many like words." As nothing is said as to whether the additions were prefixed, distributed through the book, or added at the end, this very chapter may be one of the additions. At any rate, this chapter is just the sort of thing Baruch himself might have written on his own account, in order to preserve the

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story of what must have been a highly exciting incident, and which, moreover, might have turned out very seriously for both Jeremiah and Baruch.

All this leads to the conclusion that the present book of Jeremiah is not the homogeneous product of a single occasion, but a collection of writings gathered up from time to time and attached, either by the writers themselves or by collectors, to an original and smaller body of discourses, or "words," of Jeremiah. In the present arrangement of fifty-two chapters, the first twenty-five consist mainly, though not exclusively, of discourses of Jeremiah, while the second part of the book consists mainly, though not exclusively, of narrative material describing, as Baruch might have described them, many events connected with Jeremiah and his work.

The lack of chronological order in the book may be illustrated by chapters 21, 25 and 26, where the first verse in each case gives a date for its chapter; but the dates given are in the inverse order of the chap-

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ters.¹ Another indication of the somewhat random character of the book is the occurrence of repeated passages such as, 6₁₃₋₁₅, which is almost identical with 8₁₀₋₁₂; or 16_{14,15}, which is the same as 23_{7,8}. Numerous similar repetitions may be discovered by any attentive reader.

The book, then, may best be described as the memoirs, an early form of biography, of this noble prophet. Just how or when various parts were finally brought together cannot be settled with certainty; but the chief value of the book does not depend upon an answer to this question. However the material may have been collected, it portrays the splendid figure of Jeremiah with remarkable richness of color and detail. Not only are the outward events of his life described, but "we are taken behind the veil and see revelation at work; we know the inmost thoughts and feelings of a strangely attractive character."

¹ For a suggested arrangement in chronological order see "Outline and Order" at the end of the book.

CHAPTER II¹

THE MAN HIS NEIGHBORS KNEW

BIRTHPLACE—HOME INFLUENCES—LESSONS IN HISTORY—LESSONS IN LIFE—SYMPATHY—THOUGHTFULNESS—COURAGE.

THE study of a prophet is apt to begin too far from the beginning. He appears in the Bible as one of the sacred authors; his work and authority have been accredited and vindicated; his religious position is firmly established; he has unquestionable historical importance; in brief, he is a prophet; he has arrived. When he is thus approached from the conviction of his assured greatness, it is easy to ignore the experience which preceded his ultimate victory, to regard him as one aloof from the discouragements and perplexities that harass the souls of laymen, to see in him a perfection without a process.

Where mankind is concerned this is not

¹ This chapter appeared in the *Biblical World*, November, 1916, and is reprinted here by permission.

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the divine order. The prophet was a man before he was a prophet, and any study that does not make due allowance for this hangs in the air, loses its touch with life, and becomes unreal and unconvincing. The search for the secret and significance of a prophet's character and work must begin as nearly as possible where he began. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual." Before any character can be understood it is necessary to learn what conditions surround his birth and training, what his personal characteristics were, and what influences were operative in the years of his maturity. It may not be possible to discover these in any fullness. If not, the estimate of the man and his work must be to that extent tentative. Even then, however, if the man in question has left behind him a history of undoubted importance, the difficulty of securing adequate information regarding his early life is no release from the obligation, nor from the desirability, of doing the best that is possible with the materials that are available.

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It is interesting to note that, in the case of Jesus, one of the evangelists (Luke) seems to have felt the importance of filling in as far as possible the story of the so-called "silent years" that preceded Jesus's public ministry. Even at the comparatively early date when Luke wrote, no material seems to have been available, so that he has to content himself with the meager statement that Jesus "went down along with them (his parents) to Nazareth, and did as they told him"; and that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2^{51, 52}). The latter statement is simply quoted from the story of the child Samuel (1 Sam. 2²⁶).

In the case of Jeremiah, while there is little that deals directly with his early years, his book is rich in biographic material which indirectly supplies outlines that can be filled in without serious error. No other prophet had a biographer of such devotion and assiduity as Baruch; and while the present order, or disorder, of the book leaves much to be desired, it contains such a wealth of personal

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touches that the figure of Jeremiah stands out far more clearly than that of any other Old Testament prophet.

Jeremiah's home, Anathoth, a small town not far from Jerusalem, had been a residence of priests since the days of David. When Solomon came to the throne it was to Anathoth that he banished Abiathar, the priest who had opposed Solomon's accession (1 Kings 2²⁶, 27). It has been suggested, and it is not impossible, that this Abiathar, who was a descendant of Eli, was an ancestor of Jeremiah. This would carry Jeremiah's family back to the days of the Judges. But the fact that he was of priestly descent does not necessarily connect him with these famous priests of early times, interesting as that connection would be. All that can be asserted is that the little Jeremiah grew up in a town where dwelt priestly families of ancient and distinguished traditions.

There can be no question that as the boy grew up he learned and treasured the stories of the great men of old. Not the least famous of these national heroes was, of course,

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Saul, the great first king of Israel, who had come from the tribe within whose bounds the little town of Anathoth was situated. Naturally, the stories the youthful Jeremiah heard were not told as scientific history, but, rather, as precious traditions that reflected the interests and aspirations of those who told them. In those days, and for many years afterward, no distinction was drawn between politics and religion, so that all history was religious history; and there can be no doubt that priests, who were the special custodians of the religious teaching, would not only preserve the traditions of the past, but would incorporate with those traditions their own interpretations and ideals.

The devastation of the northern kingdom a century before the time of Jeremiah stood out as a dark and desperate conclusion to a period of lessening loyalty to Jehovah, a period whose colors were all the darker in contrast to the tradition of Jeremiah's day, that Israel, in the still more ancient time of her sojourn in the wilderness, had been as a happy, faithful bride whom Jehovah wooed

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and won. The tendency was as marked then as now to glorify the distant past—the more distant, the more glorious.

The traditions above referred to are to be thought of as mainly oral. It is impossible to discover what writings, if any, may have been at hand for Jeremiah to consult. Of the writings extant in his day some were later incorporated in the Bible books, while many others, and perhaps the larger part of them, have disappeared. It is doubtful whether Jeremiah, either in his youth or in his maturity, regarded any of these writings as having that sacred character which is to-day associated with the Bible. At that time the movement had barely begun which tended to regard any writing as having sanctity in itself. God was still recognized as a living God, speaking through the living voice of his prophets, rather than as a God who had enshrined his will once for all in a fixed and changeless book.

Jeremiah, however, had more to do than to listen to the stories of the past. Life called to him through many other channels

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than the reading of many rolls. His was a rich nature; observant, imaginative, poetic, and quickly responsive not only to those aspects of life which appeal to the senses, but equally to those which are significant of spiritual backgrounds and origins.

On the testimony of this book, it is obvious that he was no recluse. He moved through life with open eyes and a loving heart. The pages of the book are richly strewn with allusions to the life of town and country. They are not dragged in as formal illustrations, but fall naturally and spontaneously from the lips of one who was at home among them. He had watched the farmer in the field (4₃), the children in the street (6₁₁), and the refiner of silver sitting over his crucible (6₂₇₋₃₀). He knew the strife of debtor and creditor (15₁₀), the humiliation of the thief when caught (2₂₆), the lamentations for the dead (16₅), and the innocent festivities of brides and weddings (2₃₂; 7₃₄). A good idea of the variety and spontaneity of his allusions may be gained by reading a few chapters consecutively, and underlining each

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illustrative reference. As in the case of the first Psalm (compare Jer. 17_{5,8}), later Bible writers are often his debtors for ideas or imagery.

These allusions throw much light on the man's temper and spirit. They are used with such appreciation and with such sympathy that one is forced to conclude that they reflect an appreciation and sympathy that noted them in the first place. As the illustrations used by Jesus reflect the country life of Palestine, and as those used by Paul reflect the highly organized life of the Roman city, so these illustrations used by Jeremiah reflect a very real background; and indirectly, but quite reliably, reveal much of his early experience and of his personal character. They portray him as a man at once discerning and friendly, one whose piety involved no asceticism, and one whose directness of appeal or rebuke, in later life, was based on thorough knowledge of the habits and limitations, the needs and possibilities, of those whom he addressed.

His ability to make effective use of his

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early experience was due largely to intellectual powers at once reflective and alert. Here again the true order of development must be emphasized. He was a thinker before he was a prophet, or, one might almost say he became a prophet because he was first a thinker. While such a statement is, of course, inadequate as an account of the whole fact, it is one which is essential. The intellectual vigor of the prophets generally has been submerged in their religious importance. For downright intellectual acuteness, and for mental powers that gave them a firm grasp of difficult situations, they have no superiors in the Old Testament. One cannot read the first chapter of Jeremiah's book without realizing that this great soul dares to challenge even a divine impulse until consent can be based upon conviction. This attitude is conspicuous throughout his career.

On the other hand, Jeremiah shared with the other great prophets their condemnation of a religion that was unintelligent or that grew out of ignorance. This has been ob-

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scured, if not entirely hidden, from many an English reader of the Bible, through an unfortunate confusion of uses for the word "heart." In current figurative use this word stands for feelings and emotions, so that a heartfelt religion, or a "religion of the heart," is regarded as more earnest, more vital, and more valid than a form of religion that may be supposed to lack this "heart" element. The English Bible seems to confirm this view. The word is of frequent occurrence, and its contexts easily permit the piously passive mind erroneously to assume that when the Hebrew writer or speaker, 2500 years ago, used the word "heart" figuratively, he used it in the modern English sense. This confusion is as misleading as it is unfortunate; or, rather, it is unfortunate because it is so misleading. In the ancient, biblical use the heart was regarded as the seat of understanding, of the broad practical knowledge on the basis of which man orders his conduct in the life of every day. And this is Jeremiah's use of the word. Thus, the Hebrew expression, "came up upon my

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heart," is the idiom, not for the modern, "I felt," but for, "it occurred to me" (compare Jer. 3₁₆; 7₃₁; 19₅; 32₃₅; Acts 7₂₃). When Jeremiah represents Jehovah as saying, "I will give them an *heart* to *know*" (Jer. 24₇), he speaks the same idiom as Jesus himself, who said, "Out of the *heart* proceed . . . *thoughts*" (Mark 7₂₁).

This Hebrew usage did not grow out of any lack of words by which to express the ideas of warmth, earnestness, or emotion. These phases of the life of the spirit were supposed to have their seat in the reins or kidneys or bowels. The modern expression, "heart and mind," the Hebrew would render as, "reins and heart" (Jer. 11₂₀). Occasionally, as at Jer. 17_{9,10}, the translators have gone beyond their strict duty of translation and have given an interpretation of the words in question. The same ambiguity occurs in the New Testament, for example, Phil. 1₈; 2₁; where the English reader should compare the King James and the Revised Versions.

It is difficult, indeed, for the modern

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reader to adjust himself to the Hebrew senses of English words, but this kind of necessity is inevitable in translations from any foreign language, and when, in the books of the prophets, the adjustment is once made, their spiritual values are seen in far clearer light, and an intellectual vigor is revealed that has been too long obscured. Jeremiah belongs in this intellectual fellowship, and the high position he holds in the gallery of the prophets is due, at least in part, to his mental gifts and to his intellectual power.

One other personal trait should be mentioned—and it is one not usually attributed to him—namely, his courage. He was bold and vigorous with a courage that was at once physical, intellectual, and spiritual. It was not a courage that was mere physical recklessness, but that deeper and more steadfast courage that is often found in refined and sensitive natures. In these courage has passed beyond mere physical abandon, springing out of an intense but transient excitement, and has become a splendid vigor

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and endurance, depending on utter surrender to exalted principles clearly seen and firmly grasped.

It was by virtue of such high-souled bravery that Jeremiah was able to withstand isolation and persecution. His book offers no complete list of the physical dangers into which he was forced, such as Paul gives in 2 Cor. 11_{24,27}, but it reports at least two occasions when he was in danger of his life (Jer. 11_{18,20}; 26₈). He had also been placed in the stocks (Jer. 20). Once he was imprisoned and left to die (Jer. 37_{16,20}), and at another time cast into a dungeon for the same fatal purpose (Jer. 38_{4,6}). But none of these things moved him. Not only was his message searching and uncompromising, but his courage matched his message.

He has been called "the weeping prophet." This is due in part to the supposition that he may have been the author of the book entitled *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*. But Milton is not a weeping poet because he wrote "Lycidas," nor is Tennyson a weeping poet because he wrote "In

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Memoriam"; and neither is Jeremiah necessarily to be regarded as a weeping prophet because he may have written these touching lamentations, whose title, at least, is obviously from some hand other than his own. There are a few places in his book that mention him as weeping, or as wishing that he might weep (9₁; 13₁₇; 14₁₇); but, surprising as it may seem, they are not more numerous than similar references to the apostle Paul (for example, Phil. 3₁₈; Acts 20₁₉). And, indeed, these scattered suggestions cannot stand against the direct and indirect testimony of the whole book.

As a matter of fact, Jeremiah wept, just as Paul wept, and just as every Oriental wept, and weeps to-day. But he was no such lachrymose weakling as might be supposed from the mild aversion with which he is regarded by some energetic Christians, and still less is he a proper subject for some of the cheap wit that claims him for its victim. Such a reputation is quite misleading and is contradicted by his whole history. He calls himself an assayer of the people, one in

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whose furnace the precious metal is separated from the dross. The word of God was in his heart "like a fire, and like a hammer that shatters the rock" (23₂₉). He was, again in his own words, "an iron pillar, a fortified city, and brazen walls, against the whole land," and they fought against him but did not prevail (Jer. 1_{18,19}; 15_{20,21}). The opposition he aroused is alone a sufficient tribute to his force and vigor. Gentle and refined he was, but neither timid nor tearful. Sympathetic, alert, courageous, he is The Invincible Saint of the Old Testament, with the force of the Hammer, the consuming power of the Flame, and the inflexible strength of the Iron Column. It is these figures that must describe him, and it is thus his neighbors knew him.

CHAPTER III

THE PERFECT PATRIOT

JUDAH'S INDIAN SUMMER—THREE POLITICAL GROUPS—FALSE PROPHETS—FIRST AND SECOND CAPTIVITIES—THE DOWNFALL OF THE NATION.

It is impossible to separate a prophet, or any other man, from the time in which he lives. He not only belongs there as a historical fact, but his interests and his hopes are there; and only with reference to these can his place and work be properly estimated. Jeremiah, like all the other prophets, conceived religion in national terms; and it was inevitable that he should be deeply concerned with national affairs. It was equally inevitable that a man who thought clearly, felt strongly, and spoke fearlessly should come into collision with those who disagreed with him, especially when the subjects of debate concerned religious principles and national policies. Jeremiah's gifts and aims made it impossible for him to remain an obscure lay-

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man or a silent citizen. He was foreordained to leadership, and soon became a man with whom the authorities were compelled to reckon. From early manhood to the close of a long and strenuous life he lived in the glare of publicity; and during all that time his influence was operative in court and temple. While for Jeremiah and his contemporaries religion and politics were inseparable, a separation is nevertheless convenient for purposes of discussion, and this chapter will be devoted to some of the political aspects of the period in which Jeremiah lived.

The outward course of events, while freighted with serious consequences, is not obscure. The so-called "nation" of Judah was really such a small affair that it is almost amusing to call it a nation. It was more like a single Swiss canton lying almost negligible between France on the one side and Austria on the other. For Judah lay between two great empires, Egypt on the south and west, and Assyria on the east and north; and the relative ascendancy of these

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two major powers constituted the main factor in the petty politics of the diminutive kingdom of Judah. It was plainly the part of wisdom for Judah to maintain the friendliest possible relations with the dominant power. But this plan was not without its perplexities, for although Egypt was closer, Assyria's greater distance was offset by her greater power. Alliance with Egypt seemed more logical, but opposition to Assyria was more dangerous.

In the earlier part of Jeremiah's career, during the reign of Josiah, a new element was introduced into the situation, which made the whole problem more confusing than ever. Troubles arose in the Mesopotamian valley. The power of Assyria began to decline. But this did not mean that Judah would be released from eastern influence; for it soon appeared that Babylon, Assyria's neighbor and rival on the south, would soon be strong enough to possess herself of the power and prestige which Assyria had so long possessed. The approaching fall of Assyria would thus effect, not the in-

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dependence of Judah, but simply an exchange of eastern masters. This shifting of the centers of power in the east gave rise to all kinds of speculations and proposals in Jerusalem; and as such great movements as these are not consummated in a moment, there was plenty of time for proposals of different policies, and the formation of corresponding parties supporting them. On the whole, the situation was favorable to Judah; and a great feeling of relief pervaded the little kingdom. The Assyrian-Babylonian difficulties between each other made an extensive western campaign by either power out of the question. Thus Judah, for the time being, had nothing to fear from the east. At this time also Egypt was quiescent as far as Judah was concerned, so that during the whole of Josiah's long reign of thirty-one years comparative peace prevailed.

It was a kind of Indian summer for Judah. Her king was wise enough and strong enough to avail himself of the opportunity to build up his cities and to extend his

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boundaries; and Judah, during this period, reached her highest point of prosperity. Toward the close of the reign, however, Egypt awoke, and planned a great eastern campaign. She apparently intended to secure a share of any spoil that might be snatched from Assyria, who was at last tottering to her fall. Egypt's route for this adventure lay northward along the coast, swinging eastward, past the shoulder of Judah, across the plain of Esdraelon. For some unexplained reason Josiah, with his utterly inadequate Judæan forces, tried to block the way. The two armies met at Megiddo; Josiah's army was routed; and he himself was killed (2 Kings 23^{29, 30}; 2 Chron. 35²⁰⁻²⁴).

The name of this famous battlefield deserves a passing word. Most of the great battles of Palestine were fought there. Mount Megiddo (Hebrew, *Har Megiddo*) rose from its southern border. Later seers, looking forward to a final conflict between the forces of good and evil, regarded this place as the ideal spot for that dramatic

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event. Greek translators, combining the two Hebrew words, produced the term, Armageddon, which has become familiar as the place for the final "battle of the Lord."

At the death of Josiah, Judah came definitely under Egyptian sway. The youthful Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, whom the Judæans had immediately placed upon the throne, was not acceptable to the victorious Pharaoh; and after a brief reign of but three months, he was carried away to Egypt, to die there in exile. While there is little in Jeremiah's book that throws light on his own attitude during this period, there is at least a touching lament over the young prince whose career was so tragic and so brief.

"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him;

But weep sore for him that goeth away;

For he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

He shall not return thither any more;

But in the place whither they have led him away shall he die,

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And shall see this land no more" (Jer. 22^{10,12}).

Egypt placed on the throne of Judah another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim by name. This is the Jehoiakim who destroyed the first roll which Jeremiah wrote, as described in chapter 36. Jeremiah comes into greater prominence during the eleven years of this king's luxurious, self-indulgent reign. At this time it became clear to Jeremiah and his friends that affairs in Judah were on the decline. For three years Judah submitted to Egypt. But at the great battle of Carchemish, in 605, the Egyptian power was broken, and Judah was compelled to pay tribute to Babylon. After three annual payments Judah revolted from her new master and stopped the tribute. By this time, however, Babylon was on her feet, and in no mood to look complacently upon such independence; so that, in 597, Nebuchadnezzar started westward on a campaign whose real goal was Egypt, but which would incidentally permit him to bring disobedient Judah to terms. Jehoiakim defeated poetic

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justice and escaped Babylon's wrath, by dying just as Nebuchadnezzar approached Jerusalem. The blow fell on the son who succeeded him.

Within the little nation, during this rather tragic succession of events, various states of mind developed. Politically speaking, three parties can be distinguished, representing three distinct points of view regarding Judah's relation with foreign powers.

Ever since the days of Isaiah, a century before this time, there had been in Jerusalem a strong party in favor of an alliance with Egypt. Its platform was plausible. Egypt was near at hand, near enough to be immediately dangerous, but also quite strong enough to give high probability to the prospect of a successful resistance against Assyria, and later against Babylon. There was, further, at least one good reason why this would have been desirable for Egypt. In view of this constant danger of a western invasion on the part of one of the Mesopotamian powers, it would be highly advantageous for Egypt to have a friendly king-

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dom, such as Judah might be, stand as a kind of buffer state between Egypt's frontier and a threatening invader. It is not at all unlikely that the activities of this Egyptian party in Jerusalem may have been instigated and encouraged from time to time by direct, if not conspicuous, representatives of Egypt's Home Office. Naturally, this party would be strongly opposed to Babylon, and would be ready to encourage and to support any movement looking toward a revolt from Babylon, such as that actually carried out by Jehoiakim. Jeremiah, however, realized the futility of reliance upon Egypt, and discouraged any such policy with his accustomed vigor. It is not surprising, therefore, that this party recognized him as an opponent from the first.

A second party, and one which was not long in discovering that it could not count on Jeremiah's support, took the ground of "no entangling alliances." This position was supposedly based upon high principles of patriotism and religion. As patriots, the members of this party stood for Judah's in-

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dependence. It was a political patriotism, but none the less popular on that account. As far back as the nation's history could reach, the high tides of prosperity had synchronized with the successful casting off of every foreign yoke; and the appeal to the glories of the past is always a popular appeal. A century earlier Isaiah had dared to assert the inviolability of Jerusalem, even when the Assyrian army was almost at her very doors; and his faith had been marvelously vindicated. In that unforgettable event Jehovah had shown that Zion was secure. He was her defense. In this later time, reliance upon the same divine support might well be regarded as an act of most loyal faith, while scorn of the foreigner might seem the truest patriotism. Jeremiah, however, did not overlook the serious possibility that circumstances might have arisen since Isaiah's day which would no longer justify the preservation of the Holy City. He was willing to leave the way open for new applications of divine principles, and unwilling to regard Jehovah as com-

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mitted to any local precedent. This attitude necessarily made Jeremiah an uncertain quantity in the eyes of the politically minded patriots. These, cherishing the doctrine of Jerusalem's eternal, divine protection, naturally regarded Jeremiah as a dangerous man, and as one whose religion, as well as his patriotism, was of doubtful loyalty.

The best known representatives of this party constitute a group of men familiarly known as the false prophets. They seem always to have been in the majority, and always to have stood for the conservative program, whatever that happened to be. They were staunch supporters of the government. It is a matter of real regret that there survives no account of them from one of their own number. The only references to them occur in the writings of their opponents and critics, the true prophets. But it is obvious that this easy classification into true and false does not tell the whole story. It is hardly credible that these so-called false prophets spoke or thought of themselves as

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false. They may have been as earnest as they were mistaken; but in that case the term "false" would apply to their points of view, and to the advices based on them, rather than to their moral character. It would be interesting to know their view of the "true" prophets. In the absence of evidence it is idle to speculate, and little more can be affirmed than that they supported the powers-that-be. The men of such a party were inevitably distrustful of an independent thinker like Jeremiah, while he, on his part, did not hesitate to condemn them and their policies.

The third party would consist of Jeremiah and his friends, although it is hardly probable that they thought of themselves as constituting a party at all. They might be called idealists, but not with any suggestion that they were lacking in practical good sense. The course of events showed that their ideas were far more practical than those of their opponents; but, of course, until the events had transpired the question of plans and policies remained open for

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debate. Of those who formed this select party the names of a few are known: Jeremiah, Baruch, Uriah (Jer. 26^{20,23}), the men named in chapter 36, and perhaps Ezekiel, who was certainly in Jerusalem at this time. On moral and religious, rather than on political grounds, this party favored submission to Babylon. They preferred to see Judah submit, with a prospect of being left in peace for the development of justice and of true religion, to seeing her play politics with Egypt and pride herself on formal piety. They placed morality above nationality, and preferred to see their little state work out her religious salvation rather than her political independence. The adherents of one or another of these parties probably include most, if not all, who had any influence on the national policies during this period. These influences continue operative up to the final catastrophe; and the outward course of events may now be resumed.

Jehoiakim had died with Nebuchadnezzar at the gates of Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, his son, was another unfortunate. Like his

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uncle, Jehoahaz, he was destined to hold the throne but three months, and then he led away into exile. Three months the city held out against Nebuchadnezzar; but it was a losing game, and the young king was forced to surrender. He, his mother, his wives, his nobles, and ten thousand of the best people of the nation were carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 24₈₋₁₆). In spite of the fact that the national existence dragged along for a dozen years after this, the little state never recovered from this blow. This is sometimes called the first captivity (B. C. 597). It took away the flower of the nation, and was the beginning of the end.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel saw clearly that it was only an inferior stock that remained. Ezekiel, who was among those taken into exile at this time, though deeply concerned with the subsequent fate of the city, never alludes to those who had been left behind. For him only that part of the nation that was now carried away was the real nation, and it is with that group only that he concerns himself. Jeremiah's atti-

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tude presents an interesting contrast with Ezekiel's. On the one hand he sees as clearly as Ezekiel the inferiority of those who remained behind. In chapter 24 he describes the exiles as "good figs," while those who were left in Palestine were "bad figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so bad"; in other words, no good. But, on the other hand, his love for the people who were left keeps him true to them. He does not ignore them as Ezekiel does; he stays with them in their losing game. This fact is vital in any adequate interpretation of Jeremiah's words about the bad figs. Such words are to be regarded as the statement of an opinion rather than as a formal announcement. It is not necessary to suppose that Jeremiah proclaimed this sort of thing from the housetop, although he would have no hesitation in doing so if he felt that any good end would be served by such a proclamation. The passage places itself at some time subsequent to the departure of the exiles, long enough afterward for the temper of those who were left to have manifested itself, and

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reflects, rather, Jeremiah's answer to the sort of question Baruch might easily have raised as to the outlook for those in exile and for those at home.

When Nebuchadnezzar started east with his captives he left on the throne Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, and uncle of the young captive, Jehoiachin. This Zedekiah seems to have been of an easy disposition and inclined to piety, but he was quite dominated by the Egyptian party (Jer. 37₃₋₁₇; 38_{4, 5, 14-16, 24-26}). After a few years of uneasy rule he flies in the face of Providence by revolting against the great power that had placed him on the throne. This sealed the doom of king, city, and nation. Nebuchadnezzar again came against the city, took it, took Zedekiah and another host of captives away with him; and, as a last stroke, demolished the city itself (chapters 21; 34; 37-39). Only the veriest handful remained, and these, after assassinating a native ruler, fled to Egypt, dragging Jeremiah with them (chapters 40-43).

With the exception of the brief, brilliant,

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heroic days of the Maccabees, some four centuries later, the Hebrews never revived their national existence. By the time permission to return was given, the hopes and aims of the people were quite transformed. Their supreme interests had become ecclesiastical rather than national. Their leader was not a king, but a high priest. The state had become a church.

During the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah the position of Jeremiah in Jerusalem had become more and more precarious, as he came into sharper and sharper conflict with the courtiers and politicians. He was a marked man; and it is impossible to understand how he could have escaped such a fate as, for instance, that of Uriah (Jer. 26^{20,23}), if he had lacked friends who were not only loyal but ready and able to provide him with places of concealment when the dangers grew especially acute. At times he may have had friends at court (38^{7,10}), but most of his friends were connected with the temple (26²⁴; 35⁴; 36¹⁰; 40⁹). While it is quite obvious that it was through these that Jeremiah was

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hidden away from the outbursts of royal wrath, the devout writer of Jer. 36₂₆ puts the thing in a nutshell when he says, "Jehovah hid him." Such biblical expressions plainly include, rather than deny, the use of human agencies. Of his ultimate fate nothing is known. There is an uncertain tradition that he was stoned to death by the Jews in Egypt.

The national downfall was as pathetic as it was tragic; and one cannot read the story, even now, without being moved to sympathy for the hapless people. And if at this late day among an alien people such sympathy should be aroused, it is not surprising that a man like Jeremiah, stirred by the ties of race and religion and by the promptings of a great soul, should have pleaded with them, borne with them, and remained with them to the bitter end. He shines like a star through the gathering clouds. He never lost his faith in God nor his love for his countrymen. When the last company was taken captive he had an opportunity to go to Babylon and be well treated (40_{1,6}). His

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counsels of submission were regarded by the Babylonians as a sign of friendliness. But he chose to remain with his own people, faithful to the last—only to perish at their hands.

CHAPTER IV

A NATIONAL REVIVAL

THE BOOK FOUND IN THE TEMPLE—ITS RELATION TO THE GREAT REFORM MOVEMENT—SIGNIFICANT RESULTS—INFLUENCE ON SUBSEQUENT RELIGIOUS LIFE.

THE religious keynote of the period was sounded in the great reformation under Josiah. It was the last vital religious movement to occur while Judah still maintained a national existence. It not only supplied the germ out of which grew most that was characteristic in the subsequent religious life of the Jews; but its influence still abides, operative to the present day. Because of this far-reaching influence it is of more interest and of more importance than the purely political aspects of the period set forth in the preceding chapter. Without some familiarity with its course and character, it is impossible to understand the real meaning of the half century leading to the exile, or

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adequately to appreciate its supreme hero, Jeremiah.

It came about in an unusual way. Josiah came to the throne as a child of eight years, placed there after a popular uprising which followed the assassination of his predecessor. The single verse of Scripture which relates Josiah's accession (2 Kings 21₂₄) affords no clue as to the origin of the uprising, or the motive which led to the selection of Josiah for the throne. Eighteen years of his reign are passed over in silence. It is possible that he was under the tutelage of some of the temple priests, perhaps of Hilkiah himself; so that he would be in preparation for definite support of the national religion as over against the widespread worship of foreign deities which had swept over the land during the preceding fifty years.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, during the progress of some repairs that were being made, there was found in the temple a book whose contents filled its first readers with consternation. The book (strictly, a roll) purported to contain certain addresses

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of Moses delivered toward the close of the wanderings in the wilderness, and dealing with all sorts of laws and instructions which, ostensibly, were intended to guide the life of the people in Canaan from the time of Moses's death. To the horror of the readers, they realized that these instructions had not been followed, that the life of the people had been quite different from the demands set forth in the book, and that the difference had never been greater than at that moment. No time was lost in carrying the book to the king, who, on hearing the book's contents, was no less dismayed than the first readers had been. He immediately gave orders that the authority of the book be investigated. This was done by taking it to one "Huldah, the prophetess," who pronounced affirmatively, not, indeed, upon the authorship of the book, but on the authority of its demands. In pursuance of these, and notwithstanding the serious and even violent changes which would be involved throughout the kingdom, the king at once set about putting into effect the civil and religious

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scheme of life outlined in this remarkable book.

Reserving for the close of the chapter a more extended reference to this famous book, it is sufficient here to remark that the reforms now undertaken correspond so closely to the requirements laid down in the biblical book of Deuteronomy that this epoch-making movement is often spoken of as the Deuteronomic Reform.

In considering the extent and influence of this historic movement one is surprised and disappointed at the lack of evidence that might account for its origin. It bursts upon the scene out of a clear sky. True, the book seems at first to supply a center from which the movement spread; but further consideration fails to find in any book, whatever book it may have been, a sufficient origin and authorization for such revolutionary activity. The idea that this book carried with it the authority of Scripture, as that is now regarded, breaks down in face of the fact that it was not recognized as having any authority until indorsed by "the prophet-

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ess"; while that single indorsement seems a very slight ground upon which to account for such an immediate and vigorous adoption of the book's contents.

It was the men behind the book who made the movement possible, and who carried it through. The book supplied the place that the kite string supplied in Franklin's familiar experiment: it became a conductor through which the lightning could be discharged. Events of this kind reach back to origins that are provokingly obscure. Some movement must have been on foot which, if it did not produce the book itself, was none the less ready to take immediate and effective advantage of its appearance.

The king himself, now in his twenty-sixth year, and strong enough to carry out the reform with vigor and success, could not, at the same time, have been so weak a character as to change his whole policy on the spur of the moment, even when that spur took the shape of a book indorsed by a prophetess. The changes are too violent. They involved too many upheavals in the social and reli-

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gious customs of the community. The king must have been prepared for the step. Who prepared him? Who laid the train that produced this explosion?

The Hebrew writers are the last ones to interrogate on such a subject. They are concerned with results, not with processes and developments. The eighteen years whose story, as far as this subject is concerned, would be one of the most interesting in human history, are passed over literally without a word! These writers would be quite content to say of any such event, "The Lord did it." But while this may be satisfactory as a statement of ultimate agency, much light and inspiration would attend a knowledge of some of the means and methods the Lord used. The book has its proper place in the story, but it supplies an occasion rather than a cause; and the names of those really responsible must remain unknown. Whoever they were, they possessed a spiritual insight which revealed new depths in the religious life, a spirit which, speaking through the pages of Deuteronomy, pro-

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duced one of the most profoundly moving books in the Old Testament.

It would be impossible here to discuss this great reformation in any detail, but a few of its salient features must be indicated. Its guiding motive is loyalty to Jehovah; its guiding method, centralization. It was religion codified.

At this time Palestine was thickly strewn with sacred places. Sacrifice might be offered at innumerable stones, trees, springs, high places, and other shrines. Many of these were sacred to Jehovah; but many others were sacred to the gods of Canaan (the baals); and some, especially in and near Jerusalem, were devoted to the worship of foreign gods; for example, gods of Egypt, of Assyria, and elsewhere. The temple which Solomon had built in Jerusalem was, of course, an important shrine; but in the north were shrines of greater sanctity and higher antiquity. So that the temple at Jerusalem, up to the time of this reform, was only one of many places where Jehovah was to be worshiped, that is, where

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sacrifices could be offered to him. With Cromwellian directness one swift stroke abolished all sacrificial worship of Jehovah except at Jerusalem, and of all foreign deities anywhere. The principle of loyalty and the method of centralization here had their perfect work.

This step marked a real advance in the religious life of the people. The multiplicity of shrines of Jehovah had unconsciously and inevitably tended to the belief in different Jehovahs, corresponding to the different shrines; so that among the less thoughtful (and these are often in the majority) the way was open for an easy descent into polytheism. Centralization of worship at Jerusalem established an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual monotheism. It is not here asserted that monotheism in any true sense was established in the minds of the people by fiat. The point is, that with one shrine, Jerusalem, it was easy and natural to accept one Jehovah; and this was a first step toward the later monotheism.

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This advantageous side of the abolishment of all shrines but one was offset by a result which, while it could hardly have been foreseen, was none the less actual and unfortunate. Whereas, up to this time, the killing of an animal for food had always been a religious act, performed at some shrine and accompanied by sacrificial ceremonies, now, since it had been ordained that there could be no valid sacrifice except at Jerusalem, this act of everyday life was robbed of its religious significance and made "secular." To deprive any act of the common life of its divine sanction is a serious matter, and this was a vital case.

Another result of the centralization movement was the sudden increase in the importance of the priests at Jerusalem. Heretofore, they had the importance of those who officiated at a royal chapel. Now they had become the supreme directors of worship at the only shrine in the nation where sacrifice to Jehovah was to be regarded as valid. This gave them not only a religious importance that no Hebrew line of priests had

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ever before possessed, but it gave them an authority which could have no rival. True, certain concessions were made on behalf of the priests who had been deprived of their office at the numerous shrines throughout the land, but this stopped far short of giving them an equality with the priests already installed at Jerusalem. For all but those at Jerusalem practical disfranchisement was the result.

One further feature of the reformation must be mentioned which, at the time, did not begin to take on the significance it is now seen to hold. This was the indorsement of the book by Huldah the prophetess. The authority thus given to a writing as such, introduced an entirely new element into the Hebrew religion, namely, the identification of divine revelation with a specific writing. Up to this time, it was commonly recognized that God made his will known through many channels, whether they were priests, kings, prophets, or "wise women." But it was always through a living person that the revelation was made. Coming through a living

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person, the revelation naturally connected itself with the circumstances of the time in which the speaker lived; and it was never doubted that, with every new condition, God would thus make known his will concerning it. There is a surprising silence throughout all the Old Testament writings down to this time regarding any appeal to a previous writing that might be looked upon as a divine instructor or arbiter for any particular occasion.

For centuries, the prophets had been looked upon as proclaimers of the will (Word) of God. They did not base their exhortations upon previous writings, greatly as that would have strengthened their words. Now, however, with the discovery of this book, and its indorsement as embodying the divine will, the Hebrew religion was facing two serious innovations. One of these led to the gradual subordination of the place and work of the prophet. He would no longer be essential. The seeker after the will of God could go to the book. The other led to the substitution of the book for God; that

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is, it came to be regarded as so perfectly the equivalent of God, as far as any revelation of the divine will was concerned, that to ask, "What is the will of God?" was equivalent to asking, "What is written?" The accessibility of the book easily furthered this practice.

One of the most serious consequences of these views of the book was the deepening conviction that revelation had reached its highest levels in the past. With the sole shrine at Jerusalem, and the Word in a book, it became less and less necessary to look for God elsewhere or later. This result did not, of course, appear immediately. Great prophets were still to arise. The hearts of the people were not yet entirely closed against the living word uttered by the mouth of a living prophet. But the movement had begun, and Jeremiah was one of the few in his generation, the only one as far as is known, who really understood the danger.

Externally, the reformation was a great success. Worship was centralized in Jerusalem, and the other shrines were forsaken,

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at least by the pious. In contrast to the tone and spirit of the preceding half century, this was now an age of faith in Jehovah, and obedience to all that he had commanded. But all the commands in Deuteronomy could not receive equal obedience. Where they were definite, specific, and objective they were obeyed with enthusiasm, but where they touched matters of spirit and motive obedience was not so easy. One could not always say just how they were to be worked out. The result was that the external features of the book were welcomed, while the inner and more spiritual features were neglected.

Deuteronomy contains not only some of the most spiritual teachings to be found in the Old Testament, but also much matter dealing with ceremony and ritual. The former element represents the special interest of the prophet, and the latter that of the priest. In exhibiting this twofold character Deuteronomy but reflects two outstanding aspects of the religious life. It has always been easier to conform to a ritual than to

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live according to moral and spiritual principles; so that the failure of the reform was not due to a fault peculiar to the Hebrews. The priest says, "Obey"; the prophet says, "Awake"; and of the two, most men prefer the former.

It is hard to believe that Jeremiah could hold aloof from this great movement, especially at the outset; and although the passage is not as definite as might be desired, Jer. 11_{1,8} seems to indicate that at first he favored the movement and cooperated with it. It was not long, however, before he saw that while there was general obedience to the outer and formal demands of the book, the response to its spiritual ideals was either superficial or lacking. From Jeremiah's point of view the reform was missing its highest aim, and he withdrew his support from it.

His support of the reform at the beginning had not been unopposed.. The new movement, which exalted the Jerusalem priesthood, at the expense of all other priests throughout the land, was one which Jere-

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miah could not support without apparent disloyalty to the priests of his own home, Anathoth. The feeling even ran so high that plots were laid against his life (11_{18,23}). On the other hand he did not gain at Jerusalem the support he had lost at Anathoth, for it soon became evident that he was ready to criticize and to condemn the most popular elements of the movement which had so greatly increased the power and prestige of the Jerusalem priesthood. Jeremiah thus was placed in a position that was open to all kinds of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, as well as being one of personal danger. It must have been as difficult as it was unpopular for a man of light and leading to advance from a position which had already gained a certain following, and one which he himself had at first supported, to a higher one, more difficult and less popular. Jeremiah, however, was quite willing to discard a program which had shown itself to be defective. In doing this he took his place in the ranks of those sons of the Spirit whose influence never dies with the generation that

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disapproved them. He was vindicated long ago. Many of his most daring positions are now accepted as matters of course. But if he were here to-day, he would be looking forward and not back, moving out beyond the lines of traditions and majorities, to new fields of truth and power which prophets alone discover. To understand him as he really was, one must have something of the spirit that would follow him were he here now.

NOTE.—A word should be added about the book of Deuteronomy. It has a two-fold aspect. On the one hand it is plainly a collection of laws; many of them of high antiquity; on the other hand it contains long hortatory passages designed to urge the people to obedience. The desired obedience, however, is not regarded as imposed from without, by arbitrary command, but as springing spontaneously from hearts filled with gratitude to Jehovah for his loving care. It has been attributed to Moses; but the book nowhere purports to have been written by him, and it is quite incredible that

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the concluding chapter should have come from his hand. If this seems to detract from the worth and importance of the book, it should be remembered that (1) the value of any book, even a book of the Bible, depends upon the truth of its contents rather than upon the name of the author, or one's knowledge of its authorship. And the undying glory of this book, whoever wrote it, is that it was the first book to apply to a body of laws an interpretation and an appeal based upon love and grateful loyalty. (2) The ascription of the Psalms to David, and of the Proverbs to Solomon, shows how natural it was for the Hebrews, down to a much later date than the days of Moses, to attribute to some great name writings that had certain traits in common. (3) It is worth while to repeat the statement made above, that to the Oriental (and the Hebrews were Orientals), teachings are of far more importance than biographical details about a teacher, or curious questions about literary proprietorship. It is through, and from, these Oriental minds that the sacred writings have come;

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and they must be approached from their own point of view.

The place of Moses is secure, and it finds its convincing testimony in the indelible impression he left upon his nation. The place of the Bible is also secure, by virtue of its inexhaustible supply of "reproof, correction, and instruction which is in righteousness," of inspiration, comfort, and cheer. And it is a matter of profound gratitude that, as far as the Bible itself is concerned, the way is left entirely open for the investigation and discovery of all facts connected with its origin and transmission, in perfect confidence that the facts are what God meant them to be, however true or false popular ideas of them may be.

The application of this free yet reverent study to the book of Deuteronomy has led most scholars to the conclusion that it must have been written after the days of Isaiah and before the days of Jeremiah. This includes an interval of nearly a century, and it is impossible to be positive as to just where in that century the origin of the book is to be

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placed. Its preparation may have extended over many years, rearrangements and additions being made from time to time through a long period. It contains material that is undoubtedly ancient; but its most original element is the hortatory setting in which the older material is placed. Those interested in a fuller statement of the various aspects of the question should consult some such work as, Driver: Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament.

CHAPTER V

CONFESSIONS

A PROPHET THINKS AND GROWS—"HIS CALL"—
"WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?"—"IS IT ALL
A MISTAKE?"—"SURE OF GOD."

IN Davidson's Old Testament Prophecy there is an extended discussion of the psychology of the prophet. Davidson has succeeded as well as any investigator, and far better than most, in penetrating the hidden processes of the prophetic consciousness. The understanding of prophecy is brought appreciably nearer when it is recognized that prophets, as well as other great men, are proper subjects of psychological study. Their psychology, however, would be a small concern, had it not been for the particular domain in which their spirits were active. Their insights and discoveries in the supreme matters of the character of God, and of the true life of man, are among the greatest marvels of history. These men, of an ob-

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scure and insignificant Oriental race, are seen to be in the highest degree original. If genius be a proper term for a religious pioneer, it is preeminently applicable to the prophets. They possessed in an unusual degree the mysterious and commanding power to announce, for the first time, ideals and principles whose enduring worth is confirmed by their continued and increasing vitality.

The utterances of these religious leaders are presented with a directness and humility so sincere that the reader forgets to think of the speaker. The thing spoken absorbs the attention. A question is rarely raised regarding a prophet's inner experiences; whether, for instance, the prophet who so directly proclaims his, "Thus saith the LORD," ever doubted his own message, ever was betrayed by the facts of life into a challenge of the divine government of the world, or ever reached a point where he felt like laying down his task as all a mistake. Even if such a question should arise in a reader's mind, it is not often encouraged. The Bible

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is not to be questioned! In the rare case where the question persists it seems a hopeless task to seek material out of which to construct an answer. The prophets as a class say so little of themselves that their personal lives are almost unknown. Only here and there is a hint available to indicate what manner of men they were. Least of all do they admit one into the psychological laboratory where hope and fear, doubt and trust, are fused into an all-conquering faith.

It is in this connection that the book of Jeremiah exhibits one of those aspects which give it its unique place in the Bible. Thanks to Baruch, the book contains a large number of passages which are, practically, pages from the spiritual diary written day by day on Jeremiah's heart, as he wrought and wondered, doubted and dared. It is these pages which may be called his confessions. They are set down, of course, without the introduction and explanation which a modern biographer would supply for such priceless documents. Baruch was a Hebrew, far more interested in a great leader

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than in a psychological "case," and very much more interested in what the Master said than in any circumstances of time, place, or occasion.

It needs but a casual glance between the lines of these deeply interesting passages, to reveal the fact that they are intimate, personal, first-hand reports of the spiritual wrestlings and aspirations of one of the purest, noblest, most courageous souls that ever lived. The book of Job, in its portrayal of its famous hero, is one of the world's masterpieces; but that portrayal is a work of art. The hero of the book, whatever the Job of history may have been, is the creation of the inspired writer. In the book of Jeremiah, on the other hand, the great prophet speaks his own native language; but what he speaks strikes, more than once, a note so similar to that struck in the book of Job that one cannot avoid the question whether some of the raw material for the great drama was not gleaned from this vivid transcript from real life. To study such utterances is to go beyond psychology. It is to deal with life,

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and to see how life, in its profounder issues and outlooks, is revealed in the experiences of just such daring and adventurous souls as the one the world knows under the name of Jeremiah of Anathoth. The message of such a soul is not to be buried under a foreign language, a distant country, and an ancient date. These are but accidents of history. The message is universal and for all time.

Logically and chronologically the prophet's career begins with a "call." By this is meant the culmination of the conviction in the prophet's mind that his life must be given to the proclamation of the divine will. Nothing is involved in the call regarding the channel through which it was received. The methods varied. The constant and determining factors were the conviction itself, and the surrender to it. The experience might be accompanied by a vision, or even seem to arise from it; but it never lacked the intellectual aspects of judgment and consent. Whatever the mystery here, it is not of a kind to remove the experience itself

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from contact with other reasonable human experiences. All spiritual experiences are mysterious. No doubt an intensity of conviction is involved in the prophet's case which exceeds the ordinary experience of the common man. But this superiority is never such as to dehumanize the prophet, however far he may outstrip the common man in many ways.

The prophet's assurance of the validity of his call depended on his own inner response. He had a "will to believe." This did not obviate all possibility of error; for doubtless many a "false" prophet sincerely believed himself "called." Time alone could vindicate the conviction. This assurance, which waited on the event, was not for the prophet alone, but also for his contemporaries. Just as the prophet had to rely upon his own inner conviction as supplying a sufficient authority for his proclamation of his message, so his hearers, and especially those who became his followers, were compelled to rely upon their own judgment regarding the authority of the prophet concerned. The

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means for the discovery or recognition of prophets then were no more definite or reliable than they are to-day. Many to-day never dream that real prophets may be now alive; and in the days of the Hebrew kingdom men lived and died without knowing that there had been a prophet among them. It is not without significance that no prophet tells of his "call" until later events had given sufficient grounds for regarding it as valid. Not until the prophet is matured and established is he ready to recount the initial steps of his surrender to the divine will. In the case of Jeremiah this is made quite clear by the narrative in chapter 36, which places the writing of the book at a time twenty-six years later than that upon which Jeremiah entered upon his prophetic career.

In placing the story of Jeremiah's call in the first chapter of the book, Baruch has observed the natural and proper order. The whole chapter is a marvel of clarity and of condensation. It reflects Jeremiah's high sense of the exalted character of the divine message; and along with this, as a particular

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consequence, there is evident that inner reluctance to assume such a task, which, somewhat like Paul's "thorn in the flesh," humbled him and distressed him throughout his whole life.

Jehovah

Before thy birth I knew thee and sanctified thee;

I have made thee a prophet to the nations.

Jeremiah

Ah, Lord Jehovah, I am no speaker;

I am but a youth.

Jehovah

Say not, I am but a youth;

But go to whom I send thee,

And speak what I command thee.

Do not fear them,

For I am with thee to deliver.

(touching Jeremiah's lips)

I place my words in thy mouth.

To-day I set thee over nations and kingdoms,

To tear up and to break down,

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To annihilate and to demolish,
To build and to plant.

(on another occasion)

Jehovah

Jeremiah, what seest thou?

Jeremiah

A branch of an almond tree.

Jehovah

Thou seest well:

I watch over my word till it comes to pass.

(Jer. 1_{4.12.})

The dramatic form of the narrative must not obscure its purport, nor give the impression that an audible dialogue necessarily took place. The intent is to portray an inner, spiritual experience, for whose description the Hebrew lacked psychological terminology or philosophic interest. When the highly dramatic method is once recognized as a literary method only, the profound significance of the story at once becomes clear. With a few concise, vivid touches it pictures a man who is, in the first place, deeply responsive to God, and eager to discover and

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to obey the divine will. In the second place, however, this man sees clearly enough the hardships, the persecutions, the ostracism, and the defeats that attend the course of any such call. Finally, he is keenly aware of qualities in himself that would hinder rather than help. He is aware of the questionings that weaken action, of the hunger for sympathetic and peaceful fellowship, and of the feeling of helplessness that threatens to unnerve the strongest souls when confronted by almost superhuman tasks.

This keen self-analysis was purified and ennobled by a humility which ignored all trace of any favorable qualifications for divine service which might reasonably have been considered. If for no other reason than that he had persisted through a quarter century of this service before this account was written, he might have alluded to the fact that he had at least some qualities of endurance, and that he could prove steadfast to his message, whatever his success. But even this modest suggestion is lacking.

Still another characteristic appears in this

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self-revealing passage. In verses 11 and 12, there is a reflection of the poet's response to the beauties of nature. It is one of those unfortunate places whose point is quite lost in translation. Early in January the almond tree of Palestine throws out its blossoms. It is the first of the trees to announce the passing of winter and the coming of spring. The Hebrews called it the wakeful, or watchful tree. Jeremiah knew it and loved it; and between the lines one can read the story of the day when, stirred in spirit, he drank in the early beauty of the Flowers of Watchfulness, while there flashed into his soul the thought of God as the Great Watcher. As a saturated solution crystallizes at a touch, Jeremiah's own wakefulness to the beauty of the world about him touched his full heart into an assurance as definite and as clear as crystal, that his reliance upon the One Who Watched over all things, would never be put to shame.

The remainder of the chapter shows how impossible it is to separate the work of the prophet from his own time and place. Jere-

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miah never supposed himself called to announce the divine will in a timeless, abstract way. His thoughts and efforts were ever directed to his own people and his own time. Even if he looked onward into the future, it was for their sakes, that he might stir them up to purer purpose, truer thinking, and more spiritual obedience.

Jeremiah's steadfast obedience to his call did not mean that he was able to preserve a perfect serenity of spirit throughout his long, dangerous career. That nervous, inquiring spirit advanced to the discovery of religious problems which would never have arisen for a more passive and contented piety. Times came when the inequalities of life, the welfare of the wicked, and the ill fare of the good, forced upon his mind questions which had never been formulated before. The facts may have been seen, but they had aroused no speculative reactions. Here first, first at least among the Hebrew writers, appears one who sees the perplexities involved in the facts, and who, having seen them, dares to grapple with them. The

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challenge here thrown down to Providence seems a bold one even to-day. How must it have seemed then!

“Righteous art thou, O Jehovah, when I strive with thee;

Yet concerning justice must I speak with thee:

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?

Wherefore are they without care that deal treacherously?

Thou hast planted them and they have taken root;

They increase and bring forth fruit:

Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins” (Jer. 12_{1,2}).

This is not the place to discuss the problem itself, but only Jeremiah’s attitude toward it. In the first place, he saw that it was there; and, in the second place, he did not evade it. It might be added that neither did he solve it; but that does not detract from his originality. The recognition of such a problem was a much greater novelty then than it is now; and it is against the

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background of his own day that the greatness of Jeremiah is to be estimated. His call to be a prophet involved no immunity from the perplexities of life; and the greater the prophets were, the more clearly they recognized the perplexities. It is significant that no inconsistency is felt between a "call" and this questioning attitude. Deeper than its apparent daring was the trust that permitted such freedom. And it was this trust, rather than any abstract or categorical answer to the question, that saved and sustained Jeremiah.

Strictly speaking, the deepest questions of life are insoluble; but, when they seem about to block all further progress, God shows, now in one way, now in another, that life is still livable, progress still possible, and trust still triumphant. This was the only answer Jeremiah received. It was not a solution; but it was a way out. He found a new meaning in his conviction that God knew his trials, and "would be in trouble with him" (Psa. 91¹⁵); and he shows his own greatness of soul in accepting this answer as sav-

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ing the situation, even if it did not solve the problem.

It was at a later time that a kindred question forced itself upon him in a still more personal way. If ever anyone had a valid excuse for desiring vindication, Jeremiah was that one; and the cry of 15¹⁵⁻¹⁸, is both intelligible and pardonable.

Jeremiah

O Jehovah, remember me, attend to me,
And on thine own behalf avenge me of my
persecutors;

Let me not be overcome through thy forbearance with them.

It is for thy sake that I am humiliated
By those who scorn thy words.

To me thy words were joy,
And the delight of my thoughts,
For thy name is upon me,
O Jehovah of Hosts.

Why is my pain unceasing
And my wound incurable?
Wilt thou fail me at the last,
As a mirage that mocks the traveler in his
thirst?

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Jehovah

If thou wilt truly return to me, I will receive thee,

And thou shalt again be my servant:

If thou speakest noble things without baseness,

My words shall again be in thy mouth.

(Jer. 15^{15f., 18, 19}).

This cry did not grow out of morbid self-regard nor stubborn self-sufficiency. He dared to give it utterance because he trusted God deeply, and with great freedom. One of his heaviest burdens had been to stand aloof from human fellowship, forced to isolation not by unfriendliness but because his attitude and his message provoked opposition, and tended to alienate him from his fellows (compare 15₁₀; 16_{2,5}). And it all seemed to have come to nothing! Had Jehovah betrayed him?

Here, again, the divine answer is an indirect one. Jeremiah is simply shown more clearly the condition under which he serves, namely, absolute purity of heart. The supreme call is not to overcome enemies, but to

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“stand before Jehovah” (verse 19) ; and this is to be reached only through self-criticism and self-correction. If Jeremiah in spiritual things, working like some assayer with an alloy, will purge away the dross of earthly weakness and passion, and bring forth what is pure and true, then he shall stand before Jehovah and Jehovah will sustain him (15_{19,21}). As a later and greater Teacher said, “The pure in heart shall see God.” There was thus awakened the conviction, wrought out in actual experience, that God not only accepts but honors a service accompanied by doubt and question when these lead to spiritual self-correction. These are not necessarily signs of depravity, nor even of spiritual danger. And Jeremiah was learning that through and by means of questions, a peace and a hope might be gained which, with the questions suppressed, might be lost forever.

Most striking of all these confessions, is the one found at 20_{7,13}. Of this it has been said, “It is one of the most powerful and impressive passages in the whole of the pro-

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phetic literature, a passage which takes us, as no other, not only into the depths of the prophet's soul, but into the secrets of the prophetic consciousness" (Peake, Commentary on Jeremiah).

Jeremiah

Thou didst entice me, Jehovah, and I
yield;

Thou hast laid hold of me and hast con-
quered.

I have become a continual laughing stock,
Everyone mocks me.

For whenever I speak I must cry out
Against villany and outrage,

Until the word of Jehovah has become a
reproach to me,

And nothing but mockery.

But if I say, "I will not mention Him,
"Nor any longer speak in His name,"

Then my heart begins to glow,

A flame of fire sweeps through me,

And I cannot keep silence (Jer. 20₇₋₉).

The large subject of the psychology of prophecy is, at best, elusive. Sufficient reference has already been made to it. The

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center of interest here is, rather, Jeremiah himself and his self-revelations. Here, in a few powerful strokes, he has portrayed both his weakness and his strength, his humiliation and his glory. On the one hand is the bitterness of soul due to the apparent failure of his message, but on the other hand there is the unswerving trust in the power of Jehovah to fulfill the word which, after all, was not Jeremiah's but Jehovah's. This ultimate confidence that the work was God's work, not his own, was Jeremiah's sole but sufficient support through all his courageous, hard-fought life. He was very sure of God. At times his feelings might give way for a moment, but it was for a moment only. He always came back to the courage, loyalty, purity, and trust of the true servant of God.

History has given Jeremiah a vindication far beyond any he ever imagined or desired. Not only in his proclamation of a divine message, but even more in the inner, personal experiences which these confessions reveal, is he the spiritual ancestor not only of the One who prayed, "Why hast thou forsaken

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me?" and, "If it be possible, let this cup pass," but also of all those who have learned that the revolt of the soul against traditional doctrines often indicates faith's vigor rather than faith's decay. Instead of being a sign that faith is lost, it may well be a sign that faith is vital and vigorous; and through these "Confessions" this larger view of faith has entered into the general heritage of all believers.

Out of these deep personal experiences there came also, for Jeremiah and for everyone since his day, a development of the idea and practice of prayer that is one of Jeremiah's most significant contributions to the rich treasure of religious experience. None before him had so definitely crossed the line separating the narrower and more popular idea of prayer as simple petition from that larger, diviner field of fellowship with God, in which communion and inspiration find fullest play. Jeremiah asked little; he prayed much. "He was the father of that true prayer in which the soul speaks its human need and its heavenly trust."

CHAPTER VI

THE COVENANT THAT FAILED

JEREMIAH'S ADVICE COMPARED WITH ISAIAH'S—
JEREMIAH'S NEW AND DIFFICULT TASK—HIS
ATTITUDE TOWARD IT—THE REAL NEED.

THE work of Jeremiah was not simply a repetition of that of the great prophets of the eighth century. It was inevitable that he should have much in common with them, and reiterate many of their demands. But as many of the conditions which they had faced had passed away, Jeremiah found himself confronted with new problems which they had not solved. In illustration of this it is worth while to refer again, somewhat more fully, to the contrast already pointed out between the attitude of Isaiah and that of Jeremiah toward the divine purpose regarding Jerusalem. It is embodied in the different policies these prophets urged the nation to adopt toward the imperial invaders from the East. During the reign of Hezekiah the

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Assyrians under Sennacherib made an extensive western campaign, in the course of which it looked as though Jerusalem would be swallowed up. With the Assyrian forces almost at the gates of the city, Isaiah had dared to advise Hezekiah to refuse to surrender, on the ground that Jerusalem was the chosen city of Jehovah, and that he would protect her. The event vindicated Isaiah's daring faith. The Assyrians withdrew leaving Jerusalem untouched.

A century later, in the days of Jeremiah, the Babylonians were on the way to repeat the tactics of the Assyrians. But Jeremiah did not echo the advice of Isaiah. On the contrary, he advised the Hebrews to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, and, when he should conquer the city and carry them away captive, to accept this event as the working out of a divine plan, to adjust themselves to their new situation, and to "seek the welfare of the land to which I have led you, and pray for it to Jehovah; for in its welfare is your welfare" (Jer. 29₇). The whole chapter should be read, and chapter 24 as well. It is not

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difficult to understand how Jeremiah's attitude would arouse violent opposition on the part of the "patriots," as well as of those who would feel that reliance upon the counsel of so great a prophet as Isaiah was the truest trust in Jehovah. It was difficult for the majority to understand that a divine message, applicable to a certain time and situation, might be flatly contradicted by an equally divine message, designed for a different situation and a different time. But divine revelation has always been of this progressive and, necessarily at times, contradictory character, and it is this kind of revelation that is to be found in the Bible. The deeper unity of spirit and aim transcends the superficial unities of time and place.

Another difference between Jeremiah and his predecessors arose out of the great reformation under Josiah. This movement had established standards unknown in the earlier time. It had centralized worship in Jerusalem, while, in Isaiah's time, shrines where Jehovah might be worshiped were numerous and unchallenged. It had led to

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a special group of priests being isolated as the legal and official custodians of the sacred ritual, although in Isaiah's day each shrine had its priest or priestly group whose eminence corresponded to that of the shrine they served. And, finally, it had appealed to a book for its authorization and direction, whereas the prophets before Jeremiah made no such appeal, their authority being solely the significant, "Thus saith the LORD."

These differences involving, as they do, the impossibility of appealing to precedents, and the necessity of reliance upon originality and insight, do not exhaust the perplexities of Jeremiah's position. One of the most serious of these was inherent in the nature of the problem. It has already been indicated that many of the requirements found in the covenant (that is, the book of Deuteronomy) permitted an external and arbitrary enforcement, which might bring about conformity, but could go no further. This external aspect of the movement was popularly regarded as sufficient and satisfactory. The voluntary obedience to which

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Deuteronomy, following Hosea, had applied the term "covenant," inevitably tended to become formal and mechanical. This tendency reacted on the popular conception of the covenant, transforming it into a sort of commercial transaction pitifully unlike the rich, spiritual response contemplated in the book of Deuteronomy.

The ambiguity here involved is far removed from anything the earlier prophets had to deal with. They could denounce the worship of foreign deities and the debased practices associated with such worship, or they could appeal from formality in worship to ethical practices in the daily life. And in these respects Jeremiah followed them. But the novel and difficult task which confronted Jeremiah was that of reaching down to the hearts of men in order to purify their motives. He must appeal from an obedience which performed to an obedience which aspired; from a Jehovah who commanded to a Jehovah who besought; from a covenant regarded as a contract to a covenant regarded as a bond of love.

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Jeremiah's recognition of the character of this task was met by the spiritual idealism which urged him to grapple with it. This throws an interesting light upon many passages in the book, especially of a denunciatory character, which are otherwise forbidding and obscure. He is here engaged in the most difficult and profound task that ever falls to the lot of men, namely, that of enlarging and deepening the conception of God.

Man's discovery of God, like his discovery of the world about him, has been gradual. It is always advancing, but never complete. Not to go beyond the bounds of the Bible itself, it is obvious that the primitive views of God held by the Hebrews, in the early days of the period of the Judges, are far below the level of the views of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah. No question is raised here of a change in God himself, but only of the gradual outreach of the mind of man toward the truth.

In man's thought of God the advance has been not only gradual but reluctant. In

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spite of his inalienable conviction that God is greater than all man's thought, he has clung desperately to his own particular conceptions of him, as though present knowledge were final and complete, as though an old error were harmless if only it were held with vigor, and a new truth fatal if it involved a break with an old one. Even when it is granted that in the past such advances have been made, it is confidently denied that in the present any advance is probable. The recognition of this attitude as a fact of human experience is the best possible preparation for an understanding of Jeremiah's supreme work and its almost insuperable difficulties. With their new and nobler conceptions of God and of his desires for men, the prophets generally, and Jeremiah in particular, saw with special clearness the contrast between man's privilege and his practice. As a result, their words are predominantly words of rebuke, warning, or denunciation. But they speak in no arbitrary or petulant spirit. Their vision of God showed life in a new perspective, and in its

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light they were appalled at the emptiness and futility of conventional religion. Yet they are not pessimists. They can be terrible in their denunciations only because they are sure of a God who meant better things for his people, of One whose chief desire was that they should live in the full realization of his love and care, and of One who stood ready to welcome and forgive all who came to him in spirit and truth. The prophet could have adopted without hesitation what Paul was to say of himself at a later day, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." In this spirit Jeremiah labored with his people, pleaded with them, prayed for them, lived for them, and died for them.

With all these facts and factors in mind, one can almost anticipate the general character of the message Jeremiah would feel himself called to proclaim. In spite of the glorious outbursts of reform in the reign of Josiah, in spite of the revolutionary trans-

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formations which had been introduced into much of the social and religious life, he saw that the old sins persisted. The idea of the covenant was magnificent—if men had only responded to its whole appeal. But they had not. And the covenant itself, as contained in the book, and imposed by the priesthood at the central temple, had failed to arouse the spirit of men or nation to a response commensurate with Jeremiah's ideals. From this point of view, the splendid covenant, confirmed by a prophetic word, promulgated as a royal edict, and imposed without compromise, had proved a splendid failure. It is not without a certain awe that one realizes the boldness, even of a prophet, in thus turning his back, not only upon downright wickedness, but upon a goodness that was superficial and incomplete, and a divine covenant that had proved inadequate.

Jeremiah, however, was so sure of his ground that he expressed himself in the only way a Hebrew could express such an assured conviction: he carried it back

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to a "Thus saith the LORD." With this as his high commission he advanced to his task. Although the people had the book itself, Jeremiah charges them with ignorance of the truth (5₄; 7₂₈). In spite of the temple's exaltation to a sanctity sole and supreme, Jeremiah denounces those who put their trust in it (7₄). Even those who call God "Father" (3₄) are not spared.

It is not to be supposed that all the people held Jeremiah's views, or even that they knew them and had rejected them. The views that Jeremiah condemns had all been set forth as of divine ordination in the book which had been the immediate occasion for the great reform. Jeremiah was not calling men back to standards which they had knowingly forsaken. He was condemning the results of efforts the people had made to conform to divine standards as they understood them. They had listened eagerly to priest and prophet, but Jeremiah condemned priest, prophet, and people together (5_{30,31}). The times were out of joint! Yet Jere-

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miah did not shrink from the Herculean task of setting them right.

He saw that the people lacked not only a will to do right, but even a knowledge of what the right should be. The covenant had failed to inform the mind and to purify the heart. Salvation from this condition could be found alone in that true knowledge of God himself which was more than a knowledge of his will. It must be a knowledge which was not only a possession but a possessor. A wisdom that fell short of this had no value for Jeremiah; and he has epitomized his own teaching, as well as that of the greater prophets, in words that, for dignity and lofty beauty, are but rarely matched, even in the biblical literature:

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom,
Neither let the strong man boast of his
strength,
Let not the rich man boast of his riches;
But if one would boast, let him boast of
this:

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That he hath understanding, and that he
knoweth me,

That I am Jehovah who doeth kindness,

Justice and righteousness in the earth:

For in these do I delight, saith Jehovah”

(9^{23,24}).

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW COVENANT

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY—THE ONLY ENDURING COVENANT—JEREMIAH'S TEACHING CONFIRMED BY JESUS—STRIKING PARALLELS BETWEEN JESUS AND JEREMIAH.

JEREMIAH was not a destructive critic. An Amos might be willing to confine himself to condemnation and rebuke, but not a Jeremiah. The more clearly he saw the depths to which, from his point of view, the people had sunk, the more he sought a way to lift them up. He was baffled by their obstinacy. His familiar saying about the ineradicable character of the Ethiopian's color and the leopard's spots, as illustrations of the persistence of the people's sinful spirit (Jer. 13₂₃), shows that the subject had already engaged and perplexed him. This was the dark side of the story. But he was deeply convinced that there was—that there must be—a bright side. There must be some

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way out. He himself might be baffled, but not Jehovah.

This conviction finds beautiful expression in the simple story of the potter at his wheels (18_{1.4}). The sight was a familiar one to Jeremiah, but this time it glowed with a new significance. As on the day when the Watchful Tree became vital with a spiritual message, so, this other day, a similar awakening transfigured the work of the potter. While Jeremiah is not the only one who has found a figurative use for the potter's work, he has put upon it the stamp of his own originality. The potter's control of the clay is a fairly obvious aspect of the operation and, without going further, both Isaiah and Paul have seen and used this aspect as illustrating the divine sovereignty. For them man is as clay in the hands of the Divine Potter in the sense that man is helpless, and the Divine Potter supreme.

Jeremiah saw further than this. He saw that the potter was not always baffled when a particular lump of clay proved refractory. If, while the wheel turned, the clay showed

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a quality unsuitable for the vessel which had been begun, the potter "made it into another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (18₄). The point is not so much that the potter had, or had not, control over the clay; that is obvious, and granted. Jeremiah was characteristically more profound. He regarded, not the power of the potter, but the fate of the clay. Modification might be necessary, but out of the same clay there came a vessel useful and worthy. Its first failure was neither final nor irretrievable. This was, for Jeremiah, a vision of hope for the people. Jehovah could still make of Israel something worth while, something worthy of the people, and worthy of himself.

Unique and highly characteristic of Jeremiah as this interpretation is, it has still further importance in marking a stage in Jeremiah's progress toward his crowning vision. The spiritual summit which he ultimately reached was "not attained by sudden flight." It was but the end of a long journey. He had been long upon the way to it. At first, almost in despair about his people,

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he regarded them as unable to do right. Yet even here, his reference to the Ethiopian and the leopard is only suggestive, not definitive. His idea is not that the people were innately, inherently bad. They had reached their low estate through the development of a habit that had brought them to badness. Their apparent incorrigibility was not really born in them, like the color and the spots. This was only a partial aspect of the case; and he passed on from here to a point where the thought of God's care and power opens the way toward the possibility of remaking the marred vessel into another, "as it seemed good to the potter to make it." Growing out of both these ideas there came the final vision which, for its far look into a future not yet reached, is unsurpassed. Even Jesus himself did no more than take up the same idea, make it his own, and then restate it in his own words.

The immediate background for Jeremiah's great message is found in the failure of the people to observe the covenant in the deeply spiritual way which alone was ade-

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quate from his point of view. With a discernment far deeper than any who had preceded him, he went straight to the heart of the matter. He saw that the trouble was with men, not with laws. Legal enactments, in their lack of power to develop a spirit of obedience, leave room for an obedience that is purely formal and mechanical. Something must always be left to the spirit. It would be impossible to devise a system of laws that should cover every detail of daily life; and the effort made in Deuteronomy to inculcate a legal system that should awaken a motive and spirit was foredoomed to failure. No matter how definite nor how drastic the ordinances had been, they failed to command the elusive life of the spirit. The enduring beauty of "the former covenant" as set forth in the book of Deuteronomy, the searching appeals based on love and gratitude, faded quickly from the sight of a people who preferred to worship God by rote.

Jeremiah seems also to have realized that if the book were retained as the embodiment of God's will, there would be no further

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place or need for prophets. But again his way out of the difficulty was as characteristic as it was unique. It is found, not by concentration of attention upon the book, nor by any impassioned defense of prophets and the prophetic line, but in the possession of the prophetic spirit by every individual. While this would make further prophets unnecessary, it would also make books unnecessary; that is, in so far as books could be regarded as a substitute for the Living Word. On one hand this might seem a return to an earlier view, but on the other hand it set a goal for the religious life which to this day is recognized as its true ideal; and one of the highest tributes to Jeremiah's profound religious insight is his discovery and assertion of this principle. There are no more searching words in the Old Testament:

“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every

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man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know Jehovah'; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31^{33,34}).

Such words as these transcend the immediate impressions of the senses, and the deductions of logical intellect. They are spiritual intuitions in which the human soul comes face to face with eternal truth, "deep calleth unto deep." How long Jeremiah had pondered over the problem, how extensively he had discussed it with Baruch, how earnestly he had prayed over it, is, of course, quite impossible to tell. The fact that it is properly described as an intuition does not imply that it was unprepared. The brevity of his statement, as it now stands in his book, is misleading in its suggestion that it had no spiritual ancestry, or that it was a detached utterance of the Almighty in whose transmission Jeremiah acted as a mere automaton. On the contrary it must be recognized as having sprung naturally—that is, di-

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vinely—out of a personal character and a spiritual life in which alone such high thoughts can root and ripen; and in these words he is revealed as the supreme saint of the Old Testament.

The ideas here set forth have long been recognized as so true that it is rarely asked when they first appeared, or who first proclaimed them. But this is their historic background. Here, for the first time, true religion is clearly expressed as, (1) the concern of the individual far more intimately than the concern of the nation as such; (2) as depending ultimately on perfect harmony with the will of God; (3) as attainable, not by any outward conformity, but only in a spirit and a life. This is nothing less than the perfect incarnation of the Spirit of God in the very being of man. Divinely illuminated, man thus thinks God's thoughts. Kindled by the divine love, man's delight becomes the doing of the divine will. In these words, "the heart of man and the law of God are no longer regarded as external to each other." God's will is no longer conceived as

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mediated by the written code, the priestly ritual, or even by the prophetic word. God is a God at hand, and not afar off. How or when this ideal is to be realized, Jeremiah does not say. "Enough that he saw it once; we shall see it by and by." In the meantime it becomes increasingly evident that the basis of all religious progress, indeed, of all human progress, is that increasing knowledge of God, which is, at the same time, a larger knowledge of truth.

Throughout his life Jesus fulfilled this "new covenant," and gave himself to the task of making it a reality in the lives of men. In his last hours with his disciples it was this new covenant that was in his mind, when, at the Last Supper, he said, "This is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22₂₀). In the term "New Testament," Christianity has an enduring reminder of this supreme teaching of Jeremiah, for he was the first to draw the contrast between old and new in this respect. The translation, "covenant" in one case, and "testament" in the other, has obscured this to some extent; but this appears

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in the translation only, for in the Greek the words are the same.

The old saying that history repeats itself is fulfilled in the way the fate of Deuteronomy has been repeated in that of the New Testament. On the basis of this literature, which sprang from a movement so supremely spiritual, subsequent generations of Christians drifted far from the inner, spiritual emphasis, and erected churches, creeds, doctrines, and all manner of external conformities, overlooking more and more the spiritual character of those who could conform and assent. The words of Jesus are spirit and life, not form and ceremony; and the familiar term, "New Testament" (better, New Covenant) should stand not only for the heritage bequeathed the world by Jeremiah, not only as a precious treasure from the lips of Jesus, but as an epitome of the ideal that will never be realized until it is seen and sought by every Christian.

A clue to the real greatness of Jeremiah might have been found in the fact that he and Elijah are the only prophets mentioned

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by name, with whom Jesus was identified by his contemporaries (Matt. 16₁₄). The association with Elijah is doubly significant in view of Jeremiah's widespread reputation for tears and timidity; for if ever there was a man of vigor, and even of violence, Elijah was that man, and he is probably the last one throughout the whole of the Old Testament who would be chosen to-day as a companion to Jeremiah.

But the traits in Jeremiah which give him the highest place, and the most enduring fame, are not those which he shares with Elijah. More nearly than any other Old Testament character, he embodies the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. He shows, in anticipation, the spirit of Jesus. Even in outward experience these two follow a strangely parallel path. Both came under popular condemnation for predicting the destruction of the temple; both aroused the hatred of the official priesthood; both were put to death by the very people they tried to help. The words "Led as a lamb to the slaughter" are used of both; for this phrase,

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which occurs in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and is used later of Jesus, is used first by Jeremiah of himself (Jer. 11₁₉). The parallel continues in spiritual things as well. Both taught with great clearness the forgiving love of God, and both proclaimed and exemplified the "new covenant" of spiritual and individual devotion to his will. Both gave to the world revelations of God, and of man's ways of access to him, that were, indeed, new at the time, but were so true, that they have been taken up into the great stream of religious thought and practice ever since.

The book of Jeremiah contains a great mass of material relating to the life and work of the prophet; but much of this material is of a fragmentary character, and much of it is in great disorder. This has made it difficult to form a convincing conception of the man himself. In addition to this, the story itself is depressing in its tragic progress. Even its most cheerful part, the time of Jeremiah's early life, is at first, distant and obscure. Then, in the years following

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the death of Josiah, the clouds become darker and darker, and the nation finally goes out in gloom. Even in Jeremiah himself nothing very winsome appears on first acquaintance, and he seems quite eclipsed by his greatest predecessor, Isaiah. In recent years, however, it is becoming clearer that, when his story has been sufficiently mastered, he was one who, in purity of heart, humility, and courage, stands alone in the Old Testament. There were, of course, devout men before his day, as there have been after, but in him the soul of man made a definite advance in its approach to God and its understanding of the divine will. In the great company of those who "by divers portions and in divers manners" prepared the way for Jesus, no voice rang truer, no hand wrought surer, no heart beat purer, than the voice, hand, and heart of Jeremiah.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The literature of Jeremiah is not extensive, but the following works may be consulted with advantage. With the exception of the Bible Dictionary they are inexpensive, and have been selected for the use of those who desire an adequate but not too technical approach to a difficult book:

DRIVER: The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. (Hodder and Stoughton.) A revised translation with introductions and short explanations.

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CHEYNE: Jeremiah, His Life and Times. (Revell.) In Men of the Bible series.

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MOULTON: Jeremiah. (Macmillan.) In Modern Reader's Bible series. Especially valuable for its introduction and its suggestion of the literary character of the book.

CHRONOLOGY

B. C.

639

**626 The Call of
Jeremiah**

**621 The Book and the
Reformation**

608

**597 The first
Captivity**

**586 The second
Captivity**

**Josiah
31 years**

**Jehoahaz
3 months**

**Jehoiakim
11 years**

**Jehoiachin
3 months**

**Zedekiah
11 years**

**Gedaliah
a few months**

**Jeremiah
60 years**

OUTLINE AND ORDER

Outline of Jeremiah according to the present order of chapters. (Abbreviated from—Kent: Student's Old Testament, Vol. III, p. 55.)

1. 1-17, early reform sermons and personal prayers; fairly chronological.
2. 18-20, preaching and persecution in the days of Jehoiakim.
3. 21-24, mistakes and crimes of Judah's rulers; not chronological.
4. 25, 46-51, foreign prophecies. This is the order of chapters in the Septuagint.¹
5. 26-29, Jeremiah and the false prophets.
6. 30-33, Messianic prophecies, perhaps the conclusion to an exilic edition of the book.
7. 34-40, biographical narratives, not chronological.
8. 40-45, Jeremiah's experiences after the final fall of Jerusalem.
9. 52 (=2 Ki. 24¹⁸-25³⁰), appendix telling of the final destruction of Jerusalem.

¹ The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language, completed in the second century B. C. The name comes from the Greek word for "seventy," on account of the tradition that seventy translators were concerned in making the translation.

OUTLINE AND ORDER

The arrangement of the chapters in their probable chronological order is a complicated and difficult task; but the attempt is justified because of the obvious lack of such order in the book as it now stands. A conservative attempt is represented in the following outline based on the work of Driver referred to on page 124:

1. In the reign of Josiah, 639-608—Jer. 1-6, 11¹⁻⁸.
2. In the reign of Jehoiakim, 608-597.—Jer. 7-9, 10^{17,25}, 11⁹⁻¹², 13-20, 25, 26, 35, 36, 45.
3. In the reign of Zedekiah, 597-586—Jer. 12^{7,17}, 22-24, 27-29, 30-33, 46-51. Specially connected with the fall of Jerusalem, 21, 24, 37, 38.
4. After 586—Jer. 10^{1,16}, 39, 40-44, 52.

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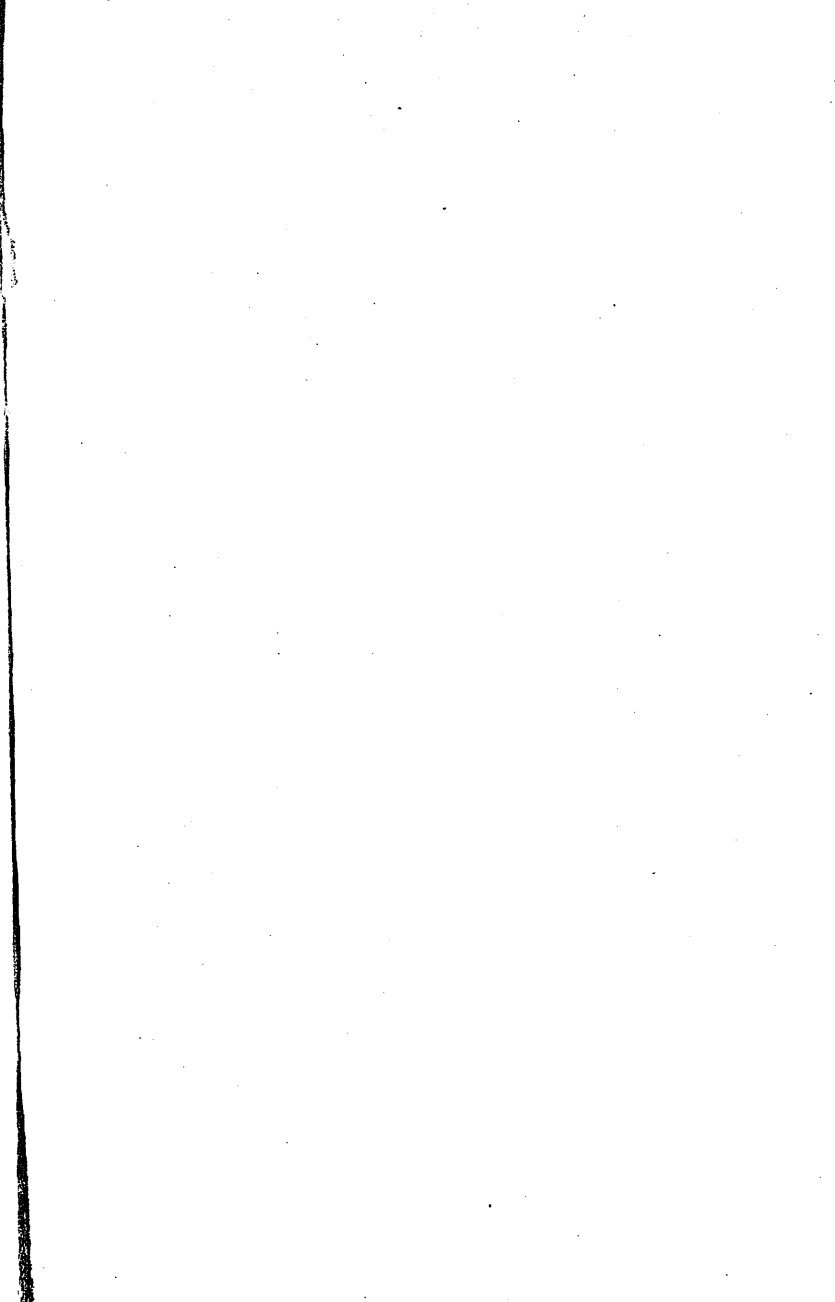
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